

**Secretary of Defense William J. Perry
General John M. Shalikashvili, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
General George A. Joulwan, Commander, U.S. European Command
Friday, December 2, 1994**

General Joulwan: Dr. Perry, General Shalikashvili, distinguished guests to include many friends, I want to thank you for being here today, and thank you, Secretary Perry, for this ceremony to recognize the men and women who made Operation Support Hope such a tremendous success.

I might also thank you and the National Command Authority for also giving me very clear command guidance and the trust and comfort to get the job done right.

Those we honor today represent over 2,000 U.S. troops -- Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines, active and reserve, the total force, who six months ago reacted quickly and decisively in saving thousands of lives in Central Africa, in Rwanda and Zaire.

Within 72 hours of being alerted, these young men and women from several different military units in Europe assembled their equipment, deployed 6,000 kilometers, and were operational in Goma, Zaire; Entebbe, Uganda; and other locations in Europe and Africa. Indeed, troops, your actions were outstanding. You joined other allies and representatives of UN and Non-Governmental Relief Organizations to stop the dying of Rwandan refugees. You worked as a superb team under the worst possible conditions. And each of you demonstrated the courage, the innovation and the discipline for which our military is renowned. You worked day and night to prepare humanitarian aid cargo and equipment from

many donors, and then operating round-the-clock you flew hundreds of sorties to deliver that material to primitive airfields in Central Africa.

Due to your efforts the death toll went from 6,000 a day at one point to less than 500 in just one week; and to less than 200 in 30 days. You saved a generation of Rwandans for the future. Within 60 days, the emergency crisis caused by disease and polluted water was over, and you assisted the UN and other relief organizations in establishing long-range programs for support of the Rwandan refugees.

You then redeployed as efficiently and effectively as you deployed. No American lives were lost during this operation, and there were no serious injuries.

No other force in the world on such short notice could have accomplished what you did in Operation Support Hope. You, the men and women of Support Hope, showed the world that you are members of a flexible, powerful, and well trained force. You demonstrated the depth of our training and the validity of our doctrine, no matter what the mission or operation. You also showed a special compassion and caring for which GIs have long been noted.

All of us in the European Command are proud of you. The people of Rwanda will never forget you. And you truly do represent the very best in America.

Congratulations, and thank you troops and your families for your sacrifices on behalf of our country.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

General Shalikashvili: You know on the day that President Clinton ordered the armed forces to go to Rwanda and to make a difference, there appeared in the Washington Post a story that quoted a physician with a renowned international humanitarian organization -- Doctors without Borders. In that story, that physician was quoted as saying that just two days before in those camps where they were, they had only counted two people that were suffering from dehydration. The following day he and his group counted 800 bodies on the road. That was only from Goma to the camp where they were working -- before they stopped counting. A tragedy of unbelievable proportions was about to unfold. The United Nations and the community of nations came to us and asked that we, America's armed forces, go and make a difference.

It wasn't by accident that they turned to us. They turned to us because experience in previous humanitarian disasters had proven that only we possessed the tools, the energy, the capability to move in quickly when others are overwhelmed and to, in fact, make a difference.

So, as General Joulwan just mentioned, within 72 hours from the time that the first airplanes lifted off, a difference was already visible. Within days, you were able to stop the dying and to greatly reduce the misery.

But, it took water purification specialists; it took engineers; it took infantrymen to guard the operation; it took MPs to put order in it all; it took airfield management specialists and maintenance folks of all types, all working together -- racing against time and working together with international relief organizations and individual volunteers to make the difference, to create the miracle that was needed to stop the dying.

And a miracle you did create. Well, perhaps more correctly, hundreds upon hundreds of small miracles which altogether added up to giving life to people that without you would be dead today.

I don't know how you feel about yourself when you look yourself in the mirror every day when you shave, but you ought to feel extraordinarily proud for whatever part you had in that operation.

We all are brought up to do good. So, we are used to the notion that when an elderly lady needs to cross the street and there's a water puddle that we would take off our coat and lay it down so she wouldn't get her feet wet. But have you ever dreamt that you would be saving the lives of hundreds upon hundreds of people? What an extraordinary feeling that is. And no one can take that away from you. You will take that with you for the rest of your lives.

I cannot tell you how we, the Joint Chiefs, feel about you, the pride we feel for you. I cannot tell you the pride that the rest of the men and women who wear America's uniform feel about what you did.

So, to you from all of us, from the bottom of our hearts -- well done. Well done.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

Secretary Perry: On behalf of President Clinton and the Department of Defense, I want to start off by thanking General Shalikashvili, General Joulwan, Ambassador Austin, and Deputy Assistant Secretary Pat Irwin for the leadership and the vision that they have shown in this entire operation. But most of all, I want to thank the men and women of the armed forces of the United States who served in the Rwandan crisis.

We are now in the midst of a holiday season -- a time to embrace the spirit of compassion and generosity. That spirit is very much alive today in the front of this auditorium. The men and the women that we honor today and all of our forces who supported Operation Support Hope brought the spirit of compassion and generosity to a place and to a people that truly needed it. With raw talent, true grit, great heart, and a lot of sweat, you responded to a desperate call for help and saved thousands of lives. The Lord needed you in Rwanda, and you did the work of the Lord.

In the post-Cold War era, we face many unique problems that call for unique missions. The Rwandan humanitarian crisis was one of those unique missions. Generally the military is not the best tool to use for humanitarian concerns. Our forces are trained, equipped, and ready to protect and defend America's security and the security of allies from threats from abroad. But under certain conditions, the use of our armed forces is appropriate, and indeed, crucial to meet the needs of the humanitarian crisis, and the Rwandan crisis met those needs.

The civil war and the resulting exodus of more than two million refugees created a human tragedy of truly biblical proportions. The starvation, the disease and the deaths dwarfed the ability of normal relief agencies to cope and the need for relief was urgent.

In the entire world, only the United States military had the unique capability to jump start the relief effort and to begin saving lives in the short time that was needed. Only the U.S. military could conduct the massive airlift over long distances, on short notices, to bring in the specialized equipment and the trained people needed to relieve the suffering.

Operation Support Hope has been brought to a successful close, and its work handed over to the international community. But the hope it brought to Rwanda lives on. Hundreds of tons of relief supplies now flow daily into the refugee camps, and civil relief organizations can now continue with the humanitarian mission that still needs to be done in Rwanda.

America has a proud legacy of helping people in need -- both at home and abroad. In Operation Support Hope, our forces were the front line of this legacy.

Alan Paton, the late South African novelist who was one of the first brave voices to speak out against the tragedy of apartheid said, "There is only one way to endure man's inhumanity to man, and that is to try in one's own life to exemplify man's humanity to man."

The men and the women of Operation Support Hope have made this great accomplishment. In their own lives they have exemplified humanity.

To the veterans of Operation Support Hope, and in particular those we honor today for their exceptional service, skill, courage, and creativity, I say you can be truly proud of your achievements. Your families -- some of whom are here today -- can also be proud of your achievements. I can tell you that as your Secretary of Defense, I am proud of you.

So, from all of our hearts, we thank you.

[Applause]

[Award presentations made]

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